

to the exigencies and opportunities of human companionship have produced psychological alterations perhaps as profound, if not as striking, as the physical differences between the chihuahua and the wolf.

Few people would bar a labrador retriever or a siamese cat from their homes, at least on grounds of temperamental unsuitability; and even fewer would admit a wolf or a European wild cat to similar intimacy. But this obvious reaction begs several more difficult questions. Domestic cats and dogs are complicated organisms, and their actions are far from merely instinctive or automatic. What qualities of temperament or personality account for their relatively accommodating dispositions? What explains the reciprocity of the relationships that many people enjoy with their cats and dogs? Has their protracted and intense experience of domestication made pets more intelligent and adaptive than their wild relatives, or less so? Do they have minds, and, if so, what is on them?

The answers to these questions depend very much on whom one asks. Since pet keeping has been widespread in the United States and other Western cultures for the last two centuries, a huge amount of information about the mental and emotional characteristics of cats and dogs has accumulated, based on the experience of

or emotional affinities with human beings require elaborate evidence to justify them. Thus, for example, Henry Gleitman, the author of a widely used college psychology text, bases his analysis of human social behavior upon this assumed dichotomy. He admits that "both animals and humans compete in aggressive encounters, court and mate, provide for their young, and have a repertoire of built-in expressive displays," but he emphasizes that "the social behavior of animals is relatively rigid and inflexible."^{*}

It is, of course, difficult to gather evidence that will persuade committed skeptics, just as it would be (and occasionally has been) with respect to fellow human beings if we were unable to talk to them. Thus scientists have tended to insist, for their own reasons, on the radical separation between humans and the rest of the animal kingdom that has long been asserted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In particular, they have denied that animals have the kinds of self-consciousness that human beings have. They have borrowed the term "anthropomorphism" from theology to brand the conflation of human

^{*}Henry Gleitman, *Psychology*, second edition (Norton, 1986), p. 366.

Lucian Freud: Double Portrait, 1985-1986. From the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum (reviewed in the December 16, 1993, issue).

the middle of her narrative, demonstrates. So she is well equipped to recognize and rebut the assumptions of her fellow-scientists, and she loses no time in doing so. The first sentence of her introduction proclaims, "This is a book about dog consciousness."

She starts by characterizing as "astonishing" and "a holdover from Christian creationism" the fact that "in the past even scientists have been led to believe that only human beings have thoughts or emotions." Then, using a tactic also employed by nineteenth-century admirers of "animal sagacity," she offers several instances of thoughtful dog behavior. For example, her husband's dog quickly fathomed and adopted the human custom of sharing an ice cream cone by taking alternate licks, without ever having seen it done by anyone else. Her husband merely licked the cone delicately, and then offered it to the dog, who helped himself to a similarly modest portion. They finished the cone in leisurely sequence.

Diverting and persuasive as such examples may be, however, Thomas also recognizes that the interpretation of animal behavior, whether anthropomorphic or otherwise, is not necessarily easy or straightforward. Observers, whatever their theoretical point of view, have to

marks they had left behind.

Among the dogs of the Thomas household, bonds of alliance, hierarchy, and affection provoked still more intense feelings. Thomas recounts at length the upheavals set off by the entry of Maria, a beautiful young husky, into a canine community which then consisted only of two pugs: Bingo and his adoring mate, Violet. To Violet's distress, Bingo was smitten with Maria, but Maria never responded to his advances with more than civility, just as she neither challenged nor acquiesced in his assumption of dominance. Finally Maria found true love with another husky, Misha.

In order to emphasize the significance of these relationships, and to force her readers to understand and evaluate them, Thomas calls them by the names of their human analogues. Puppies are "children," and older offspring are "daughters" and "sons." Mates are "wives" (even "loyal wives") and "husbands," and the relationship between them is "marriage."

This terminology is arresting—even distracting—but offers a salutary reminder that, however widespread the anthropomorphic impulse may be among pet owners, we are less likely to understand the mental lives of cats or dogs as analogous to our own when they are interacting exclusively with one another—whether they are squabbling or playing games. Still, Thomas's use of